

Taking charge of our PhD's

Increasing financial cutbacks mean we need to become even more efficient still. FOM's most valuable 'product' is the PhD student. The Central Works Council (COR) questioned how the production process of 'gaining a PhD' could be optimised.

Optimisation had been discussed for several years but was put high on the agenda during the Monday evening meeting prior to Physics@FOM Veldhoven 2011. During that meeting FOM addressed the workgroup leaders, present at Veldhoven, about the large differences in PhD completion times and success rates. Ultimately a fixed completion time for a PhD programme and a high success rate are in the interest of FOM as an organisation, the PhD student as an employee, and physics in the Netherlands as a whole! The message was taken to heart and AMOLF, for example, introduced the 3P (PhD Project Planning) programme.

The COR also investigated the issue: we itemised the various interests and influences that play a role in the completion of the PhD research. We used this to publish our own vision for possible optimisation in the PhD process. This document can be found on our website www.fom.nl/COR or www.fom.nl/centralworkscouncil.

A sneak preview: all of the parties involved have different interests. Scientists, for example, sometimes hide behind the motto 'Research cannot be planned!' Of course you can plan research – PhD students learn that during the FOM course Taking Charge of your PhD Project. This motto, however, masks the underlying wish of every curiosity-driven researcher to be able to pull out more time for research when necessary: you never know when an interesting and unknown phenomenon might occur! And from this perspective there is always pressure for FOM, workgroup leaders and PhD students to extend the PhD period slightly. After all, final year PhD students can use the knowledge and experience they have gained so far to easily obtain the extra results needed.

However, this is not the only consideration. FOM simply does not have the funding needed to stretch research budgets without limit. Furthermore PhD students are not always aware of just how harmful the lack of a completion date is. Many only start to think about the next step in their career after completing their PhDs. And those who do start the job search at an earlier stage, especially those pursuing a non-academic path, soon realise that you cannot get away with saying 'I am looking for a job starting in April, but it might also be September.'

We are now two years further and just a few weeks away from Physics@FOM Veldhoven 2013. Unfortunately, cutbacks are increasingly being felt in fundamental research. So the COR has asked FOM to remind workgroup leaders of what is good for PhD students. We would also like the FOM course 'Taking Charge of your PhD Project' to tackle these subjects.

Improving efficiency is a continuous process. Can you see any other possibilities for optimising processes within FOM? Then let us know about your ideas via cor@fom.nl or visit one of our monthly meetings. ■

**The COR
wishes everyone
a prosperous
2013!**

